

THE TURBAN VICTORY



Compiled By
Sydney Bidwell MP (Ealing - Southall)

Published by:
THE SIKH MISSIONARY SOCIETY U.K. (REGD.)
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ELIZABETH II



Motor-Cycle Crash Helmets (Religious Exemption) Act 1976

1976 CHAPTER 62

**An Act to exempt turban-wearing followers
religion from the requirement to wear a crash-helmet
riding a motor-cycle. (15 November 1976)**

BE IT ENACTED by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty
by and with the advice and consent of the Lords
Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament
and by the authority of the same, as follows:-

**Amendment of Road Traffic Act 1972.
1972c.20**

**1. In section 32 of the Road Traffic Act 1972 there shall
be inserted after subsection (2) the following new subsection:-**

**"(2A) A requirement imposed by regulations under this
section (whenever made) shall not apply to any follower
of the Sikh religion while he is wearing a turban."**

**2. This Act may be cited as the Motor-Cycle Crash-Helmets
(Religious Exemption) Act 1976.**

SYDNEY BIDWELL, MP.

**"Grant me, , O Lord enough determination,
So that I may not falter in doing good,
That when confronted by the enemy in the battlefield,
I should betray no fear.
That I should always be sure of the victory,
May my mind be trained to dwell upon the goodness,
And when the last moment of my life should come,
May I die fighting in the thick of battle."**

(Guru Gobind Singh)

**"Let living in His presence,
With the mind rid of impurities,
Be your disciple.
Keep the God given form intact,
With a turban donned on your head."**

**(The Holy Book of the Sikhs)
Maru Sohla Guru 3 page 1084 line 12.**

"Recognise ye the Whole Human Race as One."

(Guru Gobind Singh)

ੴ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਫਤਿਹ॥ SIKH MISSIONARY SOCIETY, U. K. (Regd)

8-10 Featherstone Road, Southall, UB25AA

The Sikh Missionary Society is the brain child of three eminent postgraduate literates, namely Gurbachan Singh Sidhu, Gurbakhsh Singh and Kirpal Singh Rai, who were really passionate about providing an insight into the Sikh Religion, culture and history to wider audience, especially the younger generation. Their idea of providing reading material free of charge is being followed even today.

The Society continues to produce literature in English and Punjabi and this enables people of other faiths to learn about Sikhism. In addition to this, the Society participates in other activities such as arranging lectures on Sikhism, teaching of Punjabi language, Gurbani recitation, Akhand and Sehaj Paths, AnandKarj as well as registration of marriages.

For the past 38 years the Society has also been organising highly successful annual Gurmat Camps for young Sikhs to promote community living in the Gurmat way as part of wider society, respecting others and being good citizens.

With the completion of the Guru Angad Dev Complex, a new National Resource Centre has been opened where prayer books, books on Sikhism in Punjabi and English, GCSE and A Level Punjabi books, greeting cards, CDs, DVDs and a wide range of Sikh Artifacts are available. The Sikh Missionary Society uses the latest IT tools in order to do Sikhi Parchar and has its own website as well as Email ID

The membership of the Society is open to all those who are sympathetic to the cause of the Sikh Faith and agree with the aims and objectives of the Society by completing the prescribed membership form.

Bahadur Singh
General Secretary
The Sikh Missionary Society, UK (Regd)
December 2015



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THE TURBAN VICTORY

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA**

An extra word from Sydney (Singh) Bidwell M.P.

I am delighted to consent to the printing of a second edition to the book I compiled several years ago called **The Turban Victory**.

I am sure it will be widely welcomed and should sell easily as a unique piece of Parliamentary history as much as it is a mark of British toleration and friendship towards Sikhs. In these difficult times it should help to achieve understanding in the U.K. and knowledge of the dignity and integrity of the Sikh religion.

I pay my tribute to my close friend Mr. Gurbachan Singh Rajasansir whose persistence helped to bring the book to publication and success. Because of my special regard for him I presented him with my oil painting of the Golden Temple of Amritsar which I have visited several times and where I received a sword of honour with my name inscribed on the blade.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Sikh Missionary Society U.K. is deeply indebted to Mr. Sydney Bidwell M.P. (Ealing-Southall) for giving his consent to the printing of the book 'The Turban Victory' compiled by him over a decade ago.

It was in 1974 that the Sikh Missionary Society approached Mr. Bidwell to expound the just cause of the Sikhs for exemption from the wearing of motor-cycle helmets. Once he was convinced that the Sikhs had a special case for exemption, Mr Bidwell championed the cause like a crusader sure of the victory. His compact exposition of the case in a manner so as to become intelligible to those not acquainted with the Sikh religion called forth a prolonged effort through the various stages of the bill. Mr. Bidwell's determined and concerted efforts pursued with patience, humility and dignity were crowned with success and won the gratitude of the Sikhs.

Now that fresh attempts are being made to make compulsory the wearing of helmets for workers including Sikhs engaged in building industry, the Sikh Missionary Society has forcefully reiterated its opposition to such a move pointing out to the Health and Safety Commission that turban is a religious sanctity for the Sikhs which cannot be infringed. Such a move is to put the clock back in view of the citation on page 19 of this book about the turban wearing Sikhs engaged in the building work of the car park at Westminster while other workers were wearing industrial head gear. In the context of foretelling of Mr. Bidwell, it will be futile to include Sikhs in building industry to wear helmets, which the authorities will do well to beware.

The Sikh Missionary Society has decided to print the second edition of this book in pursuance of its objective of bringing out literature to enlighten the people of other faiths about the Sikh religion and its traditions while spreading the message of truth, love and toleration as preached by the Sikh Gurus.

T. S. Manget

Hon. Gen. Secretary

Sikh Missionary Society, U.K. (Regd.)

10 Featherstone Road,

Southall, Middx. UB2 5AA

June, 1987

FORWARD

I welcome this booklet written by Mr. Sydney Bidwell M.P.

Here is recorded the process by which his bill to exempt turbanned Sikhs from wearing motor-cycle crash helmets went stage by stage through the British Parliament.

We live at a time when there is much anxiety about the situation of different ethnic groups in the British Isles. It will be good for the study of race or community relations to be able to see how this bill went through both Houses, the Commons and the Lords, finally to emerge as part of the Law of this land.

It is not easy for people of different backgrounds and persuasions to understand what exactly is important for people who have another culture and another religion from their own. This calls for listening, patience, understanding and openness. Such is the essence of community work which strives to work within a society pledged to freedom, justice and peace.

The right to wear the turban is very dear to members of the Sikh nation. It has been challenged in other areas of our society, and the success of this bill will hearten Sikhs throughout the world.

The victory of the bill's passage through Parliament is a victory for toleration, and especially for religious toleration among all people.

Rev. Michael Hollings.

**Message from S. Parkash Singh Badal,
Chief Minister, Punjab, Chandigarh, India.**

I followed with interest, the struggle of the Sikhs in the United Kingdom, against the Law, insisting that they wear helmets, when riding motor-cycles. Since the turban is an article of faith with the Sikh people, the insistence on a crash helmet, was an intrusion on their religious belief. In keeping with their tradition, the Sikhs settled in the U.K., launched a peaceful struggle to have this wrong righted. In this struggle, they had the full support of the Punjab people. I am, therefore, pleased that this effort has borne fruit, and the laws have been suitably amended to the satisfaction of the Sikhs Citizens of the United Kingdom.

I am conscious of the important role played by leaders of public opinion in the U.K., particularly, Mr. Sydney Bidwell M.P., in helping the Sikh Community resolve this vital issue. On behalf of all Punjabis, I wish to express very grateful thanks to Mr. Bidwell and all those, who helped in this just cause.

Message from Mr. Gurcharan Singh Tohra, M.P.,
President, Shiromani G.P. Committee, Amritsar, Punjab, India.

My dear Sydney Bidwell,

We very much appreciate your efforts in compiling this booklet, "The Turban Victory". The continuous struggle, waged against wearing of crash helmets by Sikhs of U.K. and your championing their just cause which compelled the British Government to see reason to the demand for exempting the Sikh Community from these obligations.

In this back-ground a small book of yours is surely an historic one that will display your significant role played in this hard-won victory.

Please accept hearty greetings at this remarkable occasion.

With best wishes and kind regards,

Yours sincerely
(Gurcharan Singh Tohra)

**Message from Siri Singh Sahib Harbhajan Singh Khalsa Yogoji
Sikh Dharma Brotherhood, Guru Ram Das Ashram
King Edward's Gardens, Acton, London.**

'The Turban Victory is truly a victory in many ways. It is a victory for the cause of individual and religious freedom; it is a victory for the Sikh community in confirming its identity; ie., the 'bana' or outward form of the Sikh; it is a simple victory of 'right' over reason and logic.

It is another victory to see this work, the documentation of a part of the struggle and growth of a universal, and international religious community. Representing the Sikhs of Western birth, I offer my congratulations upon the publication of this work, and my prayers that all of the sacrifice of five centuries, all of the history of service and tolerance which the turban presents, all of the glory and royalty instilled within its fibers, may serve to unite the Sikh community towards the highest service of all humankind.

February 1978.

THE TURBAN VICTORY

Compiled by
Sydney Bidwell, M.P.,
Southall - Ealing.

In November 1976, Her Majesty the Queen gave her Royal Assent to a Bill to exempt turbanned Sikhs from having to wear crash-helmets when riding a motor-cycle: The motor-cycle Crash-Helmets (Religious Exemption) Act, 1976. Behind this measure, which has taken about three years to achieve, is a story of human kindness, religious and philosophical toleration in Britain. That story, I believe, is worth telling.

The ultimate triumph of the Bill reflects what most of us revere in our "way of life" : the ability, sometimes in Parliament, to bring about its will across the boundaries of normal party politics: back-bencher's success over the reluctance of a government department (Tory and Labour) - in this case Transport. The measure reflects too, an acknowledgment of the forces of Anglo-Indian historical relationships which in this publication come shining through the debates recorded here in the Houses of Commons and more fully in the House of Lords.

In case some people may think such a measure in dependant solely on the persistence and skill of one Member of Parliament, let me readily acknowledge support from very many other colleagues and the warmth and friendship of the Sikh community in Britain and interest shown throughout the world. It would be wrong of me to single out any particular MP colleagues of any party in our united resolve, but several will know to whom our thanks are due.

However, all will agree, no progress with any measure may be made in Parliament, starting from a 10 minute afternoon rule Bill unless there is at the start goodwill both in and outside of Parliament.

This little story (for the British) which is so big (for the Sikhs) really began when my friend of Southall, Mr. Gurbachan Singh Rajasansir known as G.B. singh (Chairman of Northcote Ward Labour Party), brought delegations consisting of representatives of

Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Southall, both the Akali Dals of U.K. ie (Sikh Supreme Councils) and the Sikh Missionary Society (U.K.) to see me at one of my "Surgeries" at Hanwell Library in Ealing, London. G.B. Singh continued to liaise with me and the Sikh Community till the victory was achieved. A Road Traffic Act 1972 had been passed when Mr. John Peyton, M.P., Conservative, was Transport Minister. There was some opposition in Parliament on grounds of individual freedom, but the Sikh's special case was not then advanced, nor perhaps understood. Hitherto, there had been several campaigns notably in the Midlands and London, to safeguard the right to wear the long-hair and turban at work. And generally that battle had been won. The motor-cycle crash-helmet law presented a new challenge. That has now been met and overcome.

Before the resumption of Labour Government in February 1974, unsuccessful approaches were made to change the new law on behalf of the Sikhs. I was asked if the Sikhs were angry; I said no !- they were hurt. It had offended their Supreme religious symbol - the right to wear the turban at all times.

A new Labour Government in 1974, with a new Transport Minister Mr. Fred Mulley, afforded a fresh opportunity to make approaches for change. It was in September 1974 that I was visited by Southall and Ealing Sikhs - I joked, asking them if they had all come on motor-cycles. In fact they had all arrived in cars. I thought then that their protest was over reacting as I generally supported protecting the heads of youngsters who were particularly vulnerable on motor-cycles. But it was a father in G.B. Singh's delegation who changed my mind. He observed that if his turbanned son was forced to turn from the religion in this way, he was afraid he would lose his influence upon his son in other directions.

I knew then what I had to do. I was convinced an attempt should be made to get the exemption.

I then arranged for some MPs and many Sikh representatives to meet Mr. Mulley at his office in the Ministry in London. He listened carefully to the arguments, but basically remained unconvinced that the Sikhs had a special case. He refused to make the changes.

I had several private conversations with him and it was all in vain. Other MPs with Sikh communities put on pressure to no avail.

I then decided to test the "Parliamentary water" with a 10 minute rule Bill.

It was on January 28, 1975 that many Sikhs came to the House of Commons to listen to my presentation of the Bill which achieved an unopposed reading. Signatures were obtained from all parts of the House, but that is not to say that many MPs were not opposed or luke-warm. But there was no division.

SPEECH

28th JANUARY, 1975

MOTOR-CYCLE CRASH HELMETS (RELIGIOUS EXEMPTION)

4.30 P.M.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing-Southall)

I beg to move.

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to exempt turban-wearing followers of the Sikh religion from the requirement to wear a crash-helmet when riding a motor-cycle.

Put in another way, I seek to persuade the House to support a Bill to enable turbanned Sikhs to ride motor cycles. It is especially important to those Sikhs who wish to motor cycle to work when public transport is not available or to ride a motor cycle as part of their employment.

News of my move to bring a Bill before the House has evoked much ill-informed talk and newspaper correspondence. There must be no doubt that the long coiled hair and the turban go together as one of the five Ks; as they are called, of the articles of the religion dating back over 500 years. Definitions have been clearly made by the Gurus from time to time.

There are obviously occasions when the turban is unwound and removed, but that does not mean that any other head covering may be put on its place. It is this religious fact which I did not at first understand and which others may not have understood.

Some Sikhs have cut their hair and have thus turned away from the full faith and would not qualify for exemption under the Bill. It is because of the devout Sikh's firm attachment to the long hair coiled and the turban that it is not now possible for him to ride a motor cycle. Because of the present law, he has, so to speak, lost a freedom.

It was the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Peyton) who as Minister of Transport brought in the present law. There was a debate, but the religious exemption argument was not made at that time. Some hon. Members opposed the law on the ground of individual freedom as a number are opposing the compulsory wearing of car seat belts. That debate is still before the House. I will not dwell upon it, except to say that in that case there will be exceptions on pure grounds of expediency and not on any grounds of principle. It is possible for those who support crash-helmets and seat belts in general also to support my Bill.

I must admit that I was slow off the mark in the previous Parliament when the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Churchill) led a motion on this question. I became convinced when I realised that to uphold the Sikh's religious belief meant in reality not being able to ride a motor cycle.

As most hon. Members know, there is a long historic tradition of toleration in this matter. In battle time the Sikh has never been called upon to discard his turban in favour of the war hat for tin helmet worn by other soldiers under battle fire. It has been known for bullets to lodge in the hair of Sikhs. No one would care if at that time a Sikh was not wearing a tin hat. So far as I know, right up to the present time the long hair and turban are freely accepted in the three branches of the British Armed Services. I cannot imagine that the true Sikh is ever told that his services are no longer required in any shape or form.

As citizens of the Commonwealth, many Sikhs from the middle-1950s onwards have come to the United Kingdom. They are hard working and are winning their way in British society. In the past, because of native prejudice and misunderstanding, they have had to struggle for the right to wear the turban, particularly at work. We

have overcome objections to the right to wear long hair and the turban, notably in transport in the Midlands and in London. Some factory cases have been fought and overcome. Uniformed caps and helmets are not enforced against the Sikh's religious belief.

In the Post Office and in the police forces the turbanned Sikh is tolerated. Seldom was the turban question raised by employers and workpeople until the motorcycle crash-helmet question arose.

The turban is tolerated on building sites, where all workers except Sikhs are to be seen wearing protective headgear. Hon. Members will recently have witnessed this when our new car park was being built. I have a turbanned constituent who is a steel erector. The fact is that if compulsion to wear any type of headgear came into being on building sites many would leave the building industry and do something else.

Last year, with other Members and Sikhs from various parts of the country, I saw the present Minister for Transport. We found his attitude as mulish as that of his predecessor argumentative with no imagination. He seemed to think that the Sikh's exemption would lead to other clamours for exemption. I do not think that the House will believe it probable. No other group is distinguished by long hair and the turban and can be identified by their names.

Sikh representatives are eager to enter into discussions on style, colour and helping to secure enforcement-if the law is changed. Long hair and several yards of cloth in the turban is a form of head protection and could in certain circumstances prove to be an even better protection than some ill-fitting helmet.

The present Minister for Transport challenged me to show how the requirement to wear a crash-helmet might impair the Sikh's equal employment opportunity. Although my right hon. Friend said that he might reconsider this position, in fact he has not done so. I cited to him the case of the turbanned policeman. We are trying to recruit more Sikhs into the police forces. A turbanned Sikh would not under the new regulation be able to grab a motor cycle to chase a criminal. A devout Sikh cannot apply for a job as a Post Office messenger boy.

My right hon. Friend replies to those two cases I have cited—"Let the Sikhs throw away the turban."

This is why I have presented the Bill. I am sure that the House would not wish to take the attitude - "Let the Sikhs throw away the turban." I recall to the House the civilized words of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, In 1966 he defined integration thus:

"Not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance."

As far as I know, no other country gives less than the fullest tolerance to the turbaned Sikh, which means the occasional man on the motor bike.

The Bill is supported by the British Council of Churches. Our country is world-renowned for its hard-won principles of religious and political freedom. The Bill has wide support from both sides of the House and groups. It would upset no one. It would be a small step for us to take based on a great principle of religious freedom. Without it, we are not civilised and are lesser people.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Sydney Bidwell, Miss Janet Fookes, Mrs. Winifred Ewing, Mr. Frank Hatton, Mr. Daffyd Thomas, Mr. Bruce George, Mr. Cyril Smith, Mr. Neville Sandelson, Mr. David Steel, Mr. Churchill, Sir George Sinclair and Mr. Andrew Faulds.

MOTOR-CYCLE CRASH-HELMETS (Religious Exemption)

MR. SYDNEY BIDWELL accordingly presented a Bill to exempt turban-wearing followers of the Sikh religion from the requirement to wear a crash-helmet when riding a motor-cycle: and the same was read the First time: and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 21st February and to be printed. (Bill 69.)

Despite evidence of goodwill the Bill receded as more Bills were introduced on other subjects. A private Member's Bill cannot succeed unless objections to an unopposed Second Reading are removed from any part of the House; or the Government may find time for debate. It was clear in the latter part of the 1975-76 Session, no time was to be afforded although 150 members signed the following Motion:

AN EARLY DAY

308 TURBANNED MOTOR - CYCLISTS

Mr Sydney Bidwell (Labour)
The Reverend Ian Paisley (Ulster Unionist)
Sir George Sinclair (Conservative)
Mr Dafydd Thomas (Welsh Nationalist)
Mrs Winifred Ewing (Scots Nat)
Mr Cyril Smith (Liberal)

That this House is of the opinion that time should be allowed for debate to proceed on the Motor-Cycle Crash-Helmets (Religious Exemption) Bill, awaiting a Second reading.

In the new session on 19 December, 1975 the Bill was presented once more, this time without a speech. It was essential to start early to stand a chance. All the time goodwill was building up with much behind-the-scene discussion. A new Transport Minister, Dr. John Gilbert was approached but showed a similar reluctance as his predecessor, but indicated a more open mind. I wrote to the Prime Minister, then Mr. Wilson asking for reconsideration. I did this after I heard of his meeting with Speaker Mr. Dhillon, who was in Britain leading the Indian delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union conference in London around this time. I heard through the "grape-vine" that the turban question had been in evidence at their talk over lunch.

Mr. Wilson replied that he had every confidence in his Transport Minister to come to the right judgment. Apparently his faith was not misjudged.

A formal Second Reading was achieved without debate on Friday 27 February 1976. This meant that the Bill was due to go into a Committee Stage "upstairs."

This is what happened :

COMMITTEE STAGE HOUSE OF COMMONS
Wednesday 23rd June 1976

The Committee consisted of the following Members:
Mrs. Joyce Butler (in the Chair)

Bidwell, Mr. Sidney (Ealing, Southall)
Churchill, Mr. (Stretford)
Faulds, Mr. Andrew (Warley, East)
Fry, Mr. Peter (Wellingborough)
George, Mr. Bruce (Walsall, South)
Hatton, Mr. Frank (Manchester, Moss Side)
Kerr, Mr. Russell (Feltham and Heston)
Lane, Mr. David (Cambridge)
Marks, Mr. Kenneth (The Under-Secretary of State for the
Environment)
Miller, Mr. Hal (Bromsgrove and Redditch)
Ovenden, Mr. John (Gravesend)
Sandelson, Mr. Neville (Hayes and Harlington)
Sinclair, Sir George (Dorking)
Smith, Mr. Cyril (Rochdale)
Smith, Mr. Dudley (Warwick and Leamington)
Steen, Mr. Anthony (Liverpool, Wavertree)
Mrs. S. A. de Sainte Croix, (Committee Clerk)

COMMITTEE STAGE
Wednesday, 23rd June 1976
Clause I

AMENDMENT OF ROAD TRAFFIC ACT 1972

Mr. Bidwell: I am delighted that you have taken the Chair, Mrs. Butler, on this historic occasion, as I feel it to be.

I beg to move Amendment No. I, in Clause I, Page I, leave out lines 7 to 10 and insert-

"(2A) A requirement imposed by regulations under this section (whenever made) shall not apply to any follower of the Sikh religion while he is wearing a turban."

The amendment does not in any way change the principle, but I am advised that it will make the measure easier to interpret. It will be easier for the police and everyone else if a case came to court. I therefore commend the amendment as a better form of wording.

Mr. Peter Fry : The relevant words that I wish to query are "any follower of the Sikh religion"

I am sure that the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell) is concerned that there should be no abuse of the legislation. Therefore, what steps does he expect will be taken to make sure that those who are exempt are genuine followers of the Sikh religion and not people who are merely using it as an excuse not to wear a crash helmet?

Mr. Bidwell : That is a perfectly fair question, Indeed the supporters of the Bill considered, in its preparation, the feasibility of enforcement and the prospect of abuse by a masquerader-for example a person - "the long-haired lover from Liverpool", who puts something on his head. I have nothing against long-haired lovers, but the thought occurred to me that such a person might be tempted to masquerade and describe himself as a Sikh.

We came to the conclusion that the simpler the form of the wording in the Bill, the better. We decided that the onus of proof should be on the motor cyclist. Instead of suggesting the paraphernalia of carrying identity cards and so on, we thought that it would not be beyond the wit of the police to determine a person's

bona fides. The members of the Sikh community are, as we shall show in our arguments on the "clause stand part" debate, honourable people, and they will co-operate in every way possible to see that the purposes of the Bill are not thwarted by any kind of masquerader.

Mr. Dudley Smith : I wonder whether I might impose on the hon. Gentleman. There are many Sikhs in my constituency but without having done a head count, I find it difficult to remember seeing very many riding motor-cycles. The hon. Gentleman has a large number of Sikhs in his constituency. Can he tell us whether there is very much motor cycling among them? Has he any rough idea of the number of Sikhs in the country as a whole who ride motor cycles?

Mr. Bidwell : No, I have not, except that the one is constrained to feel that the Sikh community as a whole, taking advantage of our equal opportunities policies are doing so well that they normally ride on four wheels for which they are not required to wear a crash helmet, although they might be required soon to wear a seat belt, unless they come within the exemption clause for reasons other than what they are wearing on their head, which is their religious symbol. I could give instances of rare occasions where a Sikh could be seen on a motor-cycle, but one could not make an argument that no Sikh will take advantage of the measure of tolerance being suggested.

There is an argument that if such dispensation were in great volume, particularly as it affected some work measures, and so on, we should have to think again. But it is confined to the narrowness of the Bill, and one does not assume that one will see many Sikhs on motor cycles. Certainly , those who have been in the courts demonstrating-action which I counselled against-do not normally ride motor cycles, I understand.

Amendment agreed to.

Question proposed, That the clause, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Bidwell : I did not make too many comments on the amendment, and I am very conscious-I think I sense the mood of the

Committee-that I should not make a meal of this subject now and should help to get the proceedings over in reasonable time. We have all had a hard time in the House recently and I hope that moderation will shortly break out. If I had to come here again on another Wednesday, I would appreciate a little more sleep than I was able to get last night.

My original argument was made in the House with a Ten Minute Rule Bill in a previous Session of Parliament. Although I have the speech before me, the Committee will be pleased to hear that I do not intend to read it word for word, but intend to refresh my memory about some of the ground that I covered on that occasion.

Ever since Sikhs have come to this country in growing numbers, from the middle of 1954 onwards, they have had to face the vexed problem of attitude of the indigenous communities, particularly with regard to the work place. We were able to overcome that initial resistance where Sikhs chose not to wear their turbans, which is connected with the wearing of long hair and the tying of it on top of the head in a bun form, with the comb to go with that. We saw as a result, however, an element of a voluntary turning-away from the continuation of this religious symbolism.

Naturally, many other Sikhs-the more devout-were seriously worried about it, because they had experiences in India, where there has always been this long tradition of British-Sikh toleration. Indeed, in the military, what should be worn on the head by Sikhs was laid down in regulations.

That is why there is two-pronged support and good will for the Bill. On the one hand, there is the whole British-Sikh military tradition, whereby in time of war the Sikh proudly wore his long hair and turban to go with it. I have a letter from a former general telling me all about his experiences, and I put that into my original Ten-Minute Rule Bill speech. He has known of a Sikh plucking bullets out of his hair and turban, and no one ever thought of trying to enforce a situation where he had to wear any other kind of headgear. There is a rich British-Sikh military tradition.

It is not surprising that tradition in being carried on in the British Armed Forces. No Sikh in the Navy-I am talking of devout Sikhs-in the

Army or in the Royal Air Force is obliged to wear the same kind of headgear as that worn by other serving men. The other prong to the argument is that in Britain we pride ourselves on religious toleration. In fact, I go so far as to say that without that toleration we should be lesser people.

There are those two aspects to the matter. Can we seriously say that we are carrying on our tradition of religious toleration if-not in every instance, because we have won the battle in industry-society imposes its will in such a way that a Sikh begins to turn away from his family religion instead of his making up his mind voluntarily?

When the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Peyton), as Minister of Transport, brought in his original measures, the religious argument was never advanced. I was slow off the mark and I was not, at that stage, convinced of the Sikh's cause. I thought and joked that they were better off in motor cars, for the safety reasons that I have already stated. It did not enter my mind that, in certain circumstances, employment opportunities could be impaired too, apart from the rich traditions of toleration that I have described. For example, I thought of the Post Office messenger boy. The other day I saw an AA motor cyclist-I do not know whether the Royal Automobile Club has motor cyclists - but as the law stands a Sikh could not apply to be a motor cyclist in the Automobile Association.

Similarly-and this is what turned me towards the Sikh case-if a boy wanted to apply for a Post Office messenger's job, which meant riding a motor cycle, his father would be scared that he could have the job only if he discarded his turban. That would be the beginning of society imposing conditions upon him and turning him away from his religious symbolism and ultimately, one would fear, from the religion altogether. We all know the right of parents to try to get their offspring to accept their philosophical beliefs and the right not to be impeded in so doing, and the present law impedes that process.

There was the case of the turbanned policeman, and there are now turbanned men on the buses and other transport. That is

tolerated. In the Post Office Engineering Union there is a marvellous spirit of toleration, and there is a POEU-management agreement that no turbanned Sikh is to be turned away from applying for a position if he is qualified and suitable for a telecommunications engineer's post, notwithstanding the fact that there are circumstance at work where normally other kinds of headgear are required, not by law at the moment, but by edict or union-worker arrangement. That is the mood and spirit of toleration into which they have entered, and as things stand a Sikh would not be exposed to the requirement to wear protective head gear but would be withdrawn from such work.

10.45 a.m.

When the considerable engineering job of building our car park here at Westminster was under way, hon. Members may have noted that whereas other workers were wearing industrial head gear, the Sikhs were wearing their turbans. I asked one of them what would happen if he were compelled to wear a different form of headgear-I was thinking of my Bill-and he said that he would have to leave that type of employment.

The situation regarding a turbanned policeman is ridiculous-and this is where the law is made to be an ass-because he cannot jump on a motor bike and chase a criminal. A Sikh in the Army cannot be a motor cyclist without being sacrilegious. I checked that with the Army Minister not too long ago.

Mr. Dudley Smith : The vast majority of people who criticize this move-apart from people who do it purely on racist grounds-do so from a fundamental misunderstanding. They do not appreciate the religious angle. They think that some special dispensation is being given to immigrant communities and that the religious consideration is overriding.

Mr. Bidwell: They should be reminded of the history of this country and the regard that has been paid to the special position of the Jews in British society. When we are exercising our minds about militant racism in Britain these days, we recall especially the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany. However, we also remember our own rich history of toleration, with our special laws which uphold the Jewish Sabbath. There are greater experts than

myself around me this morning, but we know that they honour a different Sabbath day. A Jewish person cannot trade on both weekend days, but he can trade on Sundays in durables, whereas a non-Jewish trader cannot do so. Thus, we have the historic precedent of the Jews.

I have a letter from the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Smith) in whose constituency there is a large Sikh community. He says that there is sometimes some misunderstanding with Englishman—that this is a bad term, these days, because it rules out the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish, so let us say Britishers—who may have worked in India and known occasions when a Sikh has not worn his turban.

One such occasion is when he goes to bed. I have never been to bed with a Sikh, but I understand that when he goes to bed he unrolls his turban. I know from my experience as a co-delegate at a political conference that waiting for a Sikh to get up in the morning is as bad as waiting for a woman—not necessarily to get up in the morning, but on any occasion when a long time has to be taken in preparation for going out and facing the wide world.

There have been certain circumstances in India where the turban has not been worn, as in the case of sport where it is a matter of choice. But I have seen Sikhs playing hockey, a sport which they excel, wearing the turban. They also wear turbans when playing cricket—though is more of a fuddy-duddy game—and it is difficult to play football wearing a turban. Because there have been sporting occasions when the turban has been laid aside and the puggree—the small piece of cloth which is used for convenience instead of a turban worn instead, people have tried to argue that the requirement to wear a crash helmet is valid. It is not,

Who is to lay down religious laws on this? Someone who lived in India years ago and thinks he knows it all? One of the hallmarks of the letters is the pomposity of these people telling us non-Sikhs the doctrine of the Sikh religion. I suppose one could go to Warwick and Leamington for authenticity, Southall or the Golden Temple of Amritsar if one wanted to know the laws of the Sikh religion. Such laws are very well set out in history. The religion is over 500 years

old: 1469 was the year of Guru Nanak, who was followed by a series of nine other Gurus ending with Guru Gobind Rai who died in 1708, It is necessary to say this.

Sir George Sinclair : I hope that hon. Gentleman will come to the point on which we are now engaged and give us is the reassurance that the discipline of ensuring that this privilege is confined to strict followers of the Sikh religion is imposed also by themselves as a community. They are used to discipline and we have shared it with them. I hope that in everything they say in public they will reassure us that they will keep this privilege strictly to themselves.

Mr. Bidwell : I am quite sure that the hon. Gentleman can be so assured. I think it would be wrong to withhold from the Committee, anxious though I am to keep my speech short, that in Western Australia there is a similar law to the one we are trying to enact.

The present Indian Transport Minister, Mr. Dhillon, is well known to Parliamentarians in this country because he has led numerous Indian delegations in connection with the IPU conferences. He is not now the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, but, as I have pointed out, a Minister. When I travelled with him recently from India he told me that he proposes to bring in a Bill for the wearing of crash helmets in India, where motor cycling is becoming rife, but proposes to exempt the Sikhs from wearing them.

I think the case is one of toleration, history and the necessity for Britain to exhibit that attitude to the world. Without such toleration and understanding, we are lesser people.

The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Kenneth Marks) : I congratulate the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell) on his persistence in reaching this stage with his Bill. Very rarely do Ten-Minute Rule Bills reach a Committee stage, let alone a debate on Second Reading. Hon. Members will have noted that the original Bill was not debated on Second Reading. There were no objections from any part of the House, nor from the

Government. I am therefore taking this opportunity to express the Government's view on the substance of this amended clause.

We have great sympathy for the Sikhs point of view. Bearing in mind the long tradition of religious freedom in this country, our position could hardly be otherwise. Moreover, the Sikhs have a most prodigious record of honorable service to this country in the past, and are still making a valuable contribution to British society in many ways. They are loyal, law-abiding and devout people, and there is no doubt of the sincerity of their desire to have freedom to wear the turban, one of the symbols of their faith. We also freely recognise that in their long campaign to obtain the exemption which the Bill would provide, they have conducted their case with impressive fervour and dignity. If the House accepts the case for granting an exemption to the Sikhs, the Government will respect that decision and carry out its provisions. I am concerned however, that hon. Members should be fully aware of the arguments against a concession.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport has said on many occasions that he fully recognises the religious claims of the Sikhs, but against them he has to balance the principle that a law which is amply justified on road safety grounds should apply equally to everyone.

In this sense, there is little in common between the Bill and the Sikhs' successful campaign to persuade bus companies to accept the turban as an alternative to the uniform cap. A uniform cap is at most a convenient identifying feature, but a motor-cycle helmet is an essential safety device. When compulsory helmet-wearing was introduced, only 20 per cent, of motor-cyclists were not already wearing a helmet voluntarily: yet compulsion is still estimated to have saved some 200 fatal and serious casualties a year.

If the helmet were merely an article of clothing, there would be no question of compulsion for anyone. Many motor-cyclists who are

not Sikhs find it irksome to wear a safety helmet, and would resent a concession to this one minority group. Letters to my Department and in the motor-cycle Press indicate the strength of this feeling, and it is not confined to motor-cyclists.

Finally, can I dispose of the argument that a properly tied turban in itself provides adequate protection in the event of an accident involving a blow to the head? Motor-cycle helmets are manufactured to very stringent British standards which lay down specifications concerning material, construction, shock absorption, resistance to penetration by a sharp object, and so on. I understand that a turban has been tested and was shown to offer no measurable degree of protection.

The Bill, therefore, is not based on road safety criteria. The need for road safety provisions is of tremendous importance. The Bill is based on religious tolerance and that, too, is an important and vital part of our society, in war as well as in peace. There is no possibility of a compromise decision on this difficult choice. There will be people who will oppose it, some on the grounds of road safety, some because of religious intolerance and some on grounds of equality. I repeat that if Parliament concludes that in this case religious tolerance outweighs road safety and equality, the Government will accept that decision.

Mr. Churchill : I warmly welcome the Bill and congratulate the hon. Member for Ealing-Southall (Mr. Bidwell) in his perseverance in this matter and on the fact that he has at last brought round the powers of Government with which both he and I, together with other hon. Members in the House, have been battling. We have battled with Governments of both colours for several years on this question.

It is universally accepted in the House of Commons that the immigrant communities must be treated equally and without discrimination. There is a corollary that they must be equally subject to the law. However, I think that we must go one step further than saying that they must be treated equally and without discrimination. It is important in this age of cynicism and breaking away from religion and traditions of the past, that those who wish to

respect those traditions and religions should be allowed to do so. It is important that we in Parliament should uphold that right and respect their religious beliefs.

I believe, as has been mentioned already, that there is something of a misunderstanding among some of the groups that have opposed this measure of exemption for Sikhs wearing the turban. Anyone who is fully versed in the history of Britain's relationship with the Sikhs and the present Sikh community would, on reflection, accept that the measure before us is fully justified.

11 a.m.

There can be no doubt that, as people, we owe a deep debt of gratitude to the Sikh community over many years. For me it is sufficient that in our time of need twice this century, when we needed the Sikhs to stand by us they did so and, in the case of too many, died beside us in two world wars to enable us to live in the freedom which we today enjoy. We did not then require them to wear a steel helmet in the front line of battle. If it was sufficient to do that when we needed them in a desperate situation, the least we owe them, now that sort of crisis is past, is to continue respecting these tradition. That is why I wholeheartedly support the Bill, which is very much in accordance with the long libertarian traditions of our country.

Mr. Frank Hatton : I congratulate warmly my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell) on achieving success in bringing a private Member's Bill to this stage. I also warmly welcome the statement which the Minister has made on behalf of the Government. I remember in my own city of Manchester the campaigns in which I was involved in helping the Sikh community to bring about a change of attitude towards the wearing of the turban in the public transport services. But I fully accept what the Minister said, that this is a very different matter.

My knowledge of the Sikh community is such that I believe that they themselves will help us. As the hon. Member for Dorking (Sir G. Sinclair), said, we look to them to see that this is a genuine

exemption for people who rightly deserve that exemption. In terms of some of the thinking and the actions that are taking place in this country, this will be a real message that the British House of Commons, representing the nation can take a tolerant attitude towards a community within our midst. We want them to remain within our midst and work with us. So I warmly welcome the Bill in this respect.

Mr. Cyril Smith : I, too, welcome the Bill and compliment the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell) on his initiative in getting it to this stage. I hope that the House as a whole will find it possible to accept the Bill, and judging by the Minister's statement, that appears highly likely.

The great thing about the Bill is the religious tolerance that it shows. That is extremely important. I am the only Unitarian who is a member of the House of Commons. It is a religion which has been persecuted over the years. Indeed, in many parts of the country, even today, it has only just been admitted to the council of churches. I value religious tolerance and religious freedom very much. In my view, the Bill is a significant contribution to democracy and to the rights of human being as a whole.

The Minister said that one objection that had been made to the Bill - not by him - was that the law should apply equally to everyone. But then one argues as to which law we are talking about. Are we talking about the law which allows a man to practice the religion of his choice? Or are we talking about the law which requires a man to wear a helmet when he is driving a motor-cycle? One can argue that sort of case all day. For me, the key law is the one which deals with human liberty. In my view, that law and that justification for the Bill overrides all other considerations.

I, too, pay tribute to the record of the Sikhs over the years in the service that they have given this country. I warmly welcome the Bill, and hope that it will have a speedy and successful passage through the House.

Mr. Andrew Faulds : Let me just put in my pennyworth very briefly, as I think that some of us may wish to move to another

occasion in the House today. I should like to put on record that I am one of the most fortunate Members of this House in that I have thousands of Sikhs in what used to be called Smethwick and has now sadly been changed to the some what anonymous name of Warley. East. The contribution that the Sikhs made in terms of their social discipline and in terms of their economic and industrial contribution to our community is quite out of proportion to their numbers.

I should like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell) on his assistance in getting this necessary change on to the legislative books. I endorse very strongly the neat summary by the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Churchill), whose constituency I can never remember-I always call him "the young Churchill"- of the reasons why we have introduced the Bill. I endorse everything that he said. It is most important, particularly in the climate of race relations in Britain today, which are perhaps not quite so healthy as we would have hoped them to be, that we should exhibit the long tradition of British tolerance, especially in questions of religious tolerance. I am pleased that we seem today to be upholding the very best traditions of British tolerance and our long history of giving special consideration to the interests on minorities.

I heartily welcome the Bill, and I hope that it will very soon reach the statute book.

Mr. Anthony Steen : I, too, should like to associate myself with the congratulations that have been offered from both sides. Having traveled around the West Indies recently with the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell) I know of his perseverance in all temperatures and all terrains and his enlightened views on the importance of preserving the liberty and freedom of minority groups.

One of the important things that the Bill has shown is that it can reach this stage in the House, which many outside feel has a kind of moribund bureaucracy. This has shown that on the contrary, we are still an enlightened group of people who can respond to the needs and demands of minority groups.

Mr. Russell Kerr : I shall be even briefer than my predecessor. I

should simply like to pay tribute, as a political neighbour of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell) as well as a personal friend, to the great work that he has done in that part of the world in terms of racial tolerance.

I must admit that I did not see the full implications of the Bill when it first saw the light of day in the House of Commons. My hon. Friend has succeeded, perhaps not for the first time, in making me see it differently. I am very grateful indeed for his instruction in these matters. But, above all, I place on record, in front of my friends and colleagues from the Sikh community here with us today, my tribute to the tremendous work that my hon. Friend the Member for Southall has done a view that will be endorsed by members of all parties who happen to know the details of the efforts that he has put in that regard.

I am pleased and proud to be associated with my hon. Friend in this enterprise and to pay this modest tribute to his abilities.

Mr. Peter Fry : There is, of course, a free vote on this issue on the Opposition side. It is clear that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends feel that freedom of religious observance is very important indeed. That is why so many of them endorse the Bill. As there is a free vote, my remarks will, of course, in no way be construed as any kind of official opposition transport policy. They are entirely my own feelings on this subject.

For me, the Bill opens up one or two questions. To begin with I was a some what reluctant supporter of the original bill to enforce the wearing of crash helmets. Like many colleagues, I had received representations from my constituents. However, in the long run I decided marginally to give the Government of the day the benefit of the doubt, and I voted in favour of the measure. Since then we have moved further into the realm of compulsion and at the moment are engaged in discussions on the compulsory use of seat belts. As the Minister knows my view was that there should not be compulsion. Indeed, I think that no matter what the safety arguments are, a small section of decision should be left to the individual.

The statistics produced by the right hon. Member for Down,

South (Mr. Powell) on Second Reading of the seat belts Bill clearly indicated that there had not been the enormous saving in death and injury to be expected after the implementation of the regulations on the wearing of crash helmets for motor-cyclists. I remind the Committee that, comparing the first year following the implementation of the regulations with the 12 previous months, deaths and serious injuries increased by 11.6 per cent., which closely relates to the 12 per cent. increase in usage.

From that point of view, my inclination is not to do anything to oppose the Bill. But we must this morning take account of other considerations, and I am glad that one or two members, particularly the Minister, have touched upon them. We would be failing in our duty this morning if we did not show the British public at large that we are aware of the concern of some of them and that Parliament is not in any way ignoring their feelings but is doing what it believes to be best in the circumstances.

As has been suggested, there are motor-cyclists who feel very strongly that no section of the motor-cycling community should be exempt. These are the people who objected in the first instance to the wearing of crash helmets. But their objections, I think, are purely on the grounds of equality of treatment, and they are not preoccupied with ethnic arguments. But we should place on record that we acknowledge the fact that a section of the motor-cycling community feels put out by this legislation.

Frankly, what perturbs me is that there is probably a much wider body of opinion that will resent the Bill on other grounds—in my view, mistaken grounds. They are the people who feel most strongly on the whole question of immigration and race relations in this country. They will tend to see the Bill as making a special exemption for what is basically an immigrant community.

I happen to believe that it is important to get the message across today that this is basically a matter of religious toleration and is in no way based on racial or other grounds. Indeed, it is important to make clear that if other sections of our population needed consideration on religious grounds, the Department would take a

tolerant and benevolent attitude to them, too.

Nevertheless, I am worried that this Bill could be exploited by that small section of the population whose interests do not lie in creating good race relations but who are concerned solely to foment trouble. Therefore, we must make it absolutely clear that this Bill is one of the exceptions that proves the rule and that it will not be the rule in future in this kind of affair.

If we get that message across, we shall have shown both in Committee and the House at large that we are aware of the feelings that are widespread in the country. One of the greatest dangers that we in Parliament face is the accusation of being remote from public opinion and not understanding what the ordinary man-in-the-street may or may not be thinking. We have to make it abundantly clear that the Bill is in the best traditions of tolerance in this country. I think we have to make it abundantly clear that none the less we understand that many people are resisting it and that we are not making a decision perversely. We are making a decision in the very best interests of community relations.

11.15 a.m.

Mr. John Ovenden : Like my colleagues, I should like to place on record my appreciation of the work that has been done by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell). I must admit that I was something of a sceptic about the Bill when it first saw the light of day. I was far from convinced and I tended to regard it as a matter of expediency and convenience. It was only from my discussions with the Sikh community in my own constituency that I came to realise the deep religious principles which were involved in the Bill.

I accept what the Minister has said about the being something of a compromise as far as road safety is concerned. There are strong road safety arguments for the wearing of crash-helmets by all motor-cyclists irrespective of religion. There are, I should have thought, very strong reasons for the wearing of crash helmets probably by the pedal-cyclists as well. But on the basis of expediency and convenience we decided not to do anything about that.

When one looks at road safety regulations one must come to the conclusion that we make a lot of compromises. Our speed limits themselves, for example, are compromises. I am sure that if our speed limits were halved our road accidents would be reduced. If all traffic was reduced to walking pace there would probably be no serious accidents at all. But we compromise because, in the interest of economic efficiency, it is a bit more convenient if traffic travels faster.

Equally, I understand that we are to have quite a number of exemptions in the seat-belts Bill. These are not exemptions based on the religious belief or-

The Chairman : Order. The hon. Gentleman is going very wide. He is also out of order in mentioning another Bill.

Mr. Ovenden: I am sorry. I was trying to answer the point about whether road safety should be the primary aim and whether it is justified in certain circumstances.

The Chairman : Order. I appreciate the point that the hon. Gentleman is trying to make, but he must not make it in such a way that he is out of order.

Mr. Ovenden : I will sum up by saying that we have never in this country, said that road safety should be the be all and end all of everything that we do in legislation. On certain occasions we have put it in a back seat. We have done so far less good reasons than the reasons which are now put forward in the Bill by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall and if we can do it on those occasions, I think the justification for doing it on this occasion is well made out. I hope the Minister will accept that is a reasonable point of view to take on this issue and that we are not seeking in any way to undermine his adherence to road safety. I must admit, personally, that I have some grave doubts about whether, it is the job of the law to legislate on the subject of safety. But if I were to go into them I am sure I should be completely out of order.

I will content myself with again congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall, and by saying how much the Bill is welcomed by the Sikh community in my constituency, as it is by the

Sikh community throughout the country. I think that at no time could it have been better for Parliament to be considering a Bill of this nature. When we are faced with such instance of racial intolerance and bigotry as we have seen over the last few weeks, I thinks that this is a very good time for Parliament to go on record as being on the side of religious freedom and religious tolerance. I congratulate my hon. Friend, not only on producing the Bill, but for having the good fortune to have it going through Committee at this time.

Mr. Bidwell : I am, of course, delighted because it looks as if the Bill will become law, but we should never count our chickens before they are hatched in this place. I was saddened therefore, to read the report in the Daily Telegraph, fearing that it might be quite prophetic, with the Daily Express ringing me up at midnight on the basis of the first edition story in the Daily Telegraph. But I would not claim that it is all over bar the shouting. We still have to have the Report stage, and I want to retain the spirit of good will that has been evinced here.

Especially I am grateful to the hon. Member for Wellingbrough (Mr. Fry) because what he said had to be said. There was some danger, because of the general enthusiasm and the all-party support that is quite obviously there, that it might not have been said. I am hoping that there will not be a long winded debate on the Friday that the Bill comes up in the House for eventual ratification - if that is the word. What the hon. Member had to say was of considerable importance, and I am glad that he said it. Although he is not an enthusiastic supporter of the Bill, he is not an opponent.

I do not want to single hon. Members out, but I am grateful to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) because he has marshalled the Liberal troops behind the Bill. It achieved the remarkable and unique situation that it originally had a backer from every one of the six parties in the House, which means that the Ulster Unionists were there also, and I felt we might succeed.

I am grateful to my colleagues in my own party and to the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Churchill), who is a modest fellow.

Although he spoke powerfully and I am sure great attention will be paid to what he had to say, he forget to say that he was the veritable pioneer. He brought before the House the original motion to collect support. I do not think he was fully aware at the time that I had a considerable Sikh community, a little larger than his own. But he was on the beam from the word "go" while I had not arrived at a final determination in my own mind. I think that is worth mentioning in this Committee. Of course, history is on his side.

What we are about to do today will not be kept just to ourselves; the message will go out to the world that Britain remains great, sane, sensible and tolerant. In the years to come, we shall look back and be proud of today.

The Bill was agreed to.

THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS ATTENDED THE COMMITTEE:

Butler, Mrs. Joyce (Chairman)
Bidwell, Mr.
Churchill, Mr.
Faulds, Mr.
Fry, Mr.
Hatton, Mr.
Kerr, Mr. Russell
Lane, Mr.

Marks, Mr.
Ovenden, Mr.
Sandelson, Mr.
Sinclair, Sir George
Smith, Mr. Cyril
Smith, Mr. Dudley
Steen, Mr.

The Third Reading was achieved on Friday, July 16th in these circumstances:

Wrecking amendments were put down and others may have been acceptable if debate had taken place. As it was, the handful of opponents, withdraw their amendments in an effort to kill the Bill. With lightening speed, all amendments were withdrawn and the vote was forced at an early stage that Friday morning, in the hope, one assumes, from the standpoint of the opponents, that there would be insufficient MPs present in the favour of the Bill, on a "Slack" Friday - which is different from the other parliamentary days. But the opponents were "hoist on their own petard" and the Bill achieved a Third Reading by 40 votes to 11.

Here is the record, but it must be understood that Mrs. Margaret Thatcher and Mr. Whitelaw, Conservative leaders, had intended to vote for the Bill. They arrived too late breathless from the Shadow Cabinet because of the "snap" vote. However, the Bill was through the House of Commons.

HOUSE OF COMMONS 3rd READING

16th July 1976

MOTOR-CYCLE CRASH-HELMETS (RELIGIOUS EXEMPTION) BILL.

As amended (in the Standing Committee) considered.

Motion made and Question, that the Bill be now read the Third time, put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 56 (Third Reading).

The House divided : Ayes 40, Noes 11.

AYES

Beith, A.J.
Bowden, A. (Brighton, Kempston)
Braine, Sir Bernard
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clarke, Kenneth (Rushcliffe)
Clemison, Ivor
Cocks, Michael (Bristol S)
Davis, Clinton (Hackney C)
Ewing, Harry (Stirling)
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Ford, Ben
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W.E. (Wallsend)
Gow, Ian (Eastbourne)
Graham, Ted
Grimond, Rt. Hon J.
Harrison, Walter (Wakefield)
Hatton, Frank
John, Brynmor
Lewis, Ron (Carlisle)

MacFarquhar, Roderick
Mikardo, Ian
Morris, Alfred (Wythenshawe)
Palmer, Arthur
Pavitt, Laurie
Peart, Rt Hon Fred
Pendry, Tom
Price, C. (Lewisham W)
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
St. John-Stevas, Norman
Shersby, Michael
Silkin, Rt Hon S. C. (Dulwich)
Spearing, Nigel
Summerskill, Hon Dr Shirley
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, George
Thorpe, Rt Hon Jeremy (N Devon)
Townsend, Cyril D.
Tuck, Raphael
Weatherill, Bernard

TELLERS FOR THE AYES:

Mr. Sydney Bidwell and
Miss Jo Richardson.

NOES

Bennett, Andrew (Stockport N)
Cryer, Bob
Goodhew, Victor
Langford-Holt, S John
Mather, Carol
Winterton, Nicholas

Montgomery, Fergus
Neubert, Michael
Rooker, J.W.
Ross, William (Londonderry)
Taylor, R. (Croydon NW)

TELLERS FOR THE NOES:

Mr. Ronald Bell and

Mr. Jerry Wiggin.

Bill read the Third time and passed.

Lord Avebury very kindly agreed to move the Bill in the House of Lords. He took pains to understand the Sikh case by consultation including a visit to Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Southall.

SECOND READING HOUSE OF LORDS

5th October 1976

2. 58 a.m.

LORD AVEBURY : My Lords, I beg to move that this Bill be now read a second time. It was a great honour for me when I was invited to pilot this Bill through your Lordships' House by me honorable friend Mr. Sydney Bidwell, who scored a tremendous triumph in getting the Bill through all its stages in another place with the support of all Parties, to whom we now express gratitude, particularly to those honorable Members in all Parties who acted as sponsors of the Bill in another place and who saw it safely through to its present stage.

The Bill has the very simple purpose of exempting Sikhs from the requirement of wearing crash helmets when riding motor-cycles. In considering the Bill there are three questions which we should evaluate: first, is the wearing of the turban an essential article of the Sikh faith? Secondly, if so, what special arrangements have been made in the United Kingdom and in other countries for Sikhs to wear the turban in circumstances where others must wear some other type of headgear? Thirdly, in the light of the answers to the first two questions, should the arguments for religious freedom outweigh those of public policy which led to the compulsory introduction of crash-helmets in the 1972 Road Traffic Act?

There is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that the wearing of the turban is an essential part of the Sikh religion. The ten Gurus, the founders of the religion and the architects of it, all wore the turban themselves. In the Holy Book Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the first Guru, instructs his followers:

"Keep the God-given form intact with a turban on your head" I might have quoted many similar injunctions by the other Gurus, particularly the tenth also from the Rehat Namas, the codes of conduct of the religion.

My Lords, I have also consulted the authorities in the Sikh Gurdwaras in Bradford and Southall, and I have had the benefit of advice from one of the foremost and distinguished Sikh scholars in the world, Dr. Trilochan Singh. The opinion of those authorities is unanimous. To quote from a book of Dr. Singh, shortly to be published, and which he has given me permission to refer to:

"The turban of the Sikhs is not merely a head-dress. It is inseparably connected with the Sikh baptism and the Sikh code of conduct."

That is as authoritative a statement and interpretation of the scriptures as you will get because in the Sikh religion there is no hierarchy of clerics who can add to or embellish the doctrine as time goes by. This because the tenth Guru nominated the Holy Book as his successor. Where all are agreed on the meaning of the Holy Book there can be no room for dispute. Dr. Singh has merely stated the basic truth with which all Sikhs must agree.

My Lords, I turn to the Second question, and I shall leave out the regulations which are made in the Armed Forces which I understand my noble friend Lord Grey will be referring to later on. In recent years there have been some disputes concerning the freedom of Sikhs to wear the turban in a number of occupations, in particular in some of the major transport services in our cities, where it was a requirement in the conditions of services that a uniform had to be worn which included originally some other form of headgear than a turban. To the best of my knowledge, these disputes have now all been resolved, and everywhere they have been resolved in favour of the liberty of the Sikhs to wear the turban. Even on building sites where other employees are required to wear the standard hard hat for reasons of safety, large building firms like Costain have made an exception for the Sikhs.

If one turns to the case of the motor-cyclists elsewhere in the Commonwealth, in States that have otherwise made crash-helmets compulsory, as in the United Kingdom, there has been an exemption for Sikhs. That is certainly true in the countries from which I have been able to obtain information - in Singapore, Malaysia, Western Australia and in Saskatchewan. In Saskatchewan, the requirement

that Sikhs should wear a crash-helmet was ruled unconstitutional in the Supreme Court on the grounds that it would interfere with the practice of religion.

Finally I turn to the third question. Undoubtedly the introduction of crash-helmets under 1972 Act reduced the number of deaths and serious injuries on the roads. I do not think that individuals have an absolute right to fail to take any such action that injury might be caused to themselves, provided that no other person is harmed. But we consider that people should be compelled to do things for their own safety irrespective of whether any other persons are involved. Personally, I should like to see more restrictions imposed on the use of motor-cycles by young people, but this is another question.

My Lords, I think it would be generally agreed that the measures that we take to protect individuals from harm are matters of expediency, whereas the freedom of the Sikhs to wear the turban, as I have shown, is a fundamental question of religious principle. If it is said that the Sikhs can avoid any conflict with the existing law by using other means of transport, that is tantamount to saying that we will deny them the freedom to engage in certain occupations where the use of a motor-cycle might be incidental to the employment. Such as the Police, the Post Office and certain units of the Armed Forces.

Nor can it be maintained that we have not already on the Statute Book many examples of exemption on the grounds of religion, the latest of which is the Employment Protection Act 1975, which grants exemption from belonging to a union to certain people who object on religious grounds. Noble Lords will be aware that a case has recently been tested in the courts, when members of the Christadelphians were dismissed by British Rail for refusing to join the National Union of Railwaymen. They appealed against dismissal and have been upheld by the Industrial Court. There are many other examples of exemption from the general law on religious grounds, and so no precedent is being created by this Bill.

From one point of view we might say this is a small Bill : it is short, and as regards its effect it may not seem to be of tremendous importance. But it is of tremendous importance, of fundamental

important to the Sikhs community, and it is essential, if we are to comply with the spirit as well as with the letter of the Human Rights Convention. It will be hailed as a great step forward in the Sikh community in our own country, and across the world I believe it will enhance the great reputation this country has earned for conferring freedom on all citizens of our country. I beg to move.

Moved, That the Bill be now read 2a. - (Lord Avebury)

3.7 a.m.

LORD MOWBRAY and STOURTON: My Lords, I do not propose to detain your Lordships very long. Noble Lords will agree that the issues involved are both clear cut and straight forward, and that the noble Lord who opened the debate is to be complimented on the eloquent, lucid and concise manner in which he summarised them. In my opinion, he has brought to your Lordships attention a question which is of the greatest importance to a most deserving section of Her Majesty's subjects, the Sikh community in this country. I wish to lend my support to the noble Lord's proposal to grant to the Sikhs exemption from the law on crash-helmets.

The question of Sikhs and crash-helmets has aroused some interest and public discussion over the last few months, not only in the Sikh community, where, as we know, feelings run very high, but also in the country at large. Some commentators have on occasions questioned the exact theological status of the turban and whether it is absolutely binding on a Sikh to wear one. However, I would suggest that this is not a fruitful line of discussion. The study of other religious systems is not one that can be mastered in a short time, and this is perhaps particularly true of the great oriental religions. However, as in all cases involving religious convictions of others, we must respect even when we do not necessarily understand. Also we ought to be guided in matters concerning other faiths by the members of those faiths themselves. When in the case of the Sikhs you find a whole religious community united in its strength of feeling on a given issue, it would seem to be most foolish to question their

judgment. I would submit that so far as concerns the Sikh religion we should accept what the Sikhs themselves say.

To turn to another aspect of this subject, it was perhaps inevitable that some commentators would see the proposal to exempt Sikhs from the legislation on crash-helmets as having implications for race relations, to use the current terminology. Fears have been expressed on occasion that to exempt the Sikhs might arouse feelings of resentment among the rest of the population, and this would naturally impair racial harmony. If this is so, if there are persons, who feel such resentment, then I would argue that this is because they are inadequately informed; in particular they must have forgotten that during the two World Wars Sikh troops in the forces of the British Empire were not forced to wear steel helmets.

Even with Friday sittings, and late nights, and early mornings, we should be here from now until Christmas if we were to give adequate discussion to the Anglo/Sikh military tradition. It could be argued that this subject is rather more congenial, rather more constructive, rather more in accord with the nation's best interests and finest traditions than many of the matters which we will be considering over the next weeks, but let that pass. To recount just one incident in their glorious history, on 4th July 1915 a Sikh Regiment went into the battle at Gallipoli with 10 officers and 700 men. At the end of the day two officers and 70 men survived. During the Second world War 112,000 volunteered, and that does not include the substantial numbers who were already serving in the Indian Army before 1939. These men in many cases crossed two continents in order to fight and, if need be, to die in a war with whose causes and aims they were by no means intimately involved. Why did they do so? I would submit that they found that the British Empire provided them with scope and inspiration, and a fuller outlet for their energies than many recent accounts of Imperial history would have us believe.

The Sikhs fought side by side with Britain in our wars because the Empire inspired their idealism and harnessed all the noblest instincts of a warrior race in a common cause. As long as Britain is a nation we will commemorate the heroism of our war dead, whose sacrifice secured our national survival. As long as we do this we will

acknowledge an undying debt to the Sikh people, to whom we are bound by the most sacred of ties, in that some of our best young men died on the same battlefields in the same fight. These are ties and debts that we must remember when we consider race relations. Indeed, I feel that we should not use the term at all with reference to our relations with the Sikhs. To do so would display insensitivity and indeed irreverence. It would be an insult to the fallen to acknowledge no further bond to their descendants than that of race relations.

However, and this is the essential connection between Anglo/Sikh military history and the matter we are considering today, none of this would have been possible if we had attempted to force Sikh troops to wear tin hats. If we had done this, we would immediately have deprived ourselves of the Sikhs services. This is recognised in the Indian Army today by the exemption of Sikh troops from the regulation on protective headgear. As General Sir Reginald Arthur Savory (who incidentally wanted very badly to be here tonight and only the late hour prevented him) who took part as a subaltern at the Gallipoli engagement which I mentioned, and who was later colonel-in-chief of the Sikh Regiment, has said, "In our hour of need we did not press the matter of headgear on the Sikhs", It would be downright ignoble, I would suggest, to press it now.

If there are those in the country who do not understand why we are enacting this measure, then we must explain the facts to them. I have confidence in the British people's respect for their traditions. I believe that they will readily understand as long as they are given a full explanation and I would urge noble Lords to support this measure.

3.15 a.m.

EARL GRAY : My Lords, as the hour is very late for a debate, I beg the patience and indulgence of the House in making this, my maiden speech. I promise to be as brief as possible and I shall try to be non-controversial. I recently saw a heading in an Indian newspaper which read:

"We die with turbans. Let us live, work and die with turbans." Part of the heading had been substituted with the words:

"Let us live, work and ride with turbans."

That is the crux of the matter. We have in this country laws which are laid down for the protection of the community at large, mostly based on the assumption that we are all the same. There are, as we know, exceptions to some rules. The law advocating the wearing of crash-helmets while driving a motor-cycle may very well be an exception in the case of the Sikh community.

The Sikhs, as a young nation, are renowned for their fighting ability and their allegiance to this country. When World War II was declared, a military order was issued stating that every soldier in the Indian Army should wear a steel helmet. The Sikhs refused to fight if they were compelled to comply with that, and the order was later withdrawn in their favour. There are a number of letters from commanding officers highly commending the Sikhs in battle, and I will illustrate this with some extracts to show that the many yards of cloth wound around the head of the Sikh gives effective protection. A Colonel Hughes who commanded a Punjab regiment writes:

"The Sikhs all wore the head-dress and there were no more head injuries in the battalion than in any other battalion wearing steel helmets.

There is a story of the noble Viscount, Lord Monckton of Brenchley, concerning a Sikh who bicycled diligently from Singapore to Great Britain to join the 10th Hussars. When he arrived at Tidworth the question arose as to whether the Sikh would be able to wear his turban. The noble Viscount, who was then a Brigadier, referred the question to His Royal Highness the late Duke of Gloucester, who was commander in chief, who said that without question the Sikh could, provided he displayed the regimental badge on his turban, which he duly did. Sir Reginald Savory also gives instances of having known Sikhs picking bullets out of their turbans during and after battle. In *The Sikhs*, written by General Sir Charles Gough, he says that

"...under no circumstances, not even to save his life in fever, will a Sikh allow his hair to be cut."

These are but a few extracts, of which there are many. To the

Sikhs, the turban is a symbol of dignity and self-respect. A Sikh's way of life is wound up, if noble Lords will excuse the expression, with the wearing of the turban and the use of other symbols. We in our Christian religion have ways and rituals which are in themselves very peculiar to other creeds.

My Lords, the laws laid down by the Guru state that the Sikhs must not smoke, cut or trim their hair and these rules are followed strictly by the faithful. In occupations where the wearing of protective helmets or uniform caps is compulsory, the Sikhs have campaigned vigorously for their religious beliefs to be accepted, and this they have achieved in many instances. As a minority religious sect, one must show tolerance and understanding to their religious beliefs. As has been shown, if not proved, by the various extracts I have used, the turban in itself, with the long hair, offers some protection, even if it is not, as in my view, as effective as a regulation crash-helmet. Only time will tell if the Sikhs will be a hazard to themselves or other road users.

3.19 a.m.

LORD MONSON : My Lords, it is my pleasurable duty to be the first to congratulate the noble Earl, Lord Grey, on an excellent maiden speech. It had all the qualities we look for, in particular brevity, and I must say how much I admired the calm demeanour of the noble Earl, bearing in mind that he had to wait until 3.15 a.m. to make it.

I am afraid that I shall have to strike a slightly discordant note, but there is another side to the case which I think should be put, because it is shared by many people in this country. In making this point, I must take seconds rather than minutes as I go back to the basic helmet controversy in the first place. As anybody who has ever ridden a motor-cycle will know, if one travels at 35 m.p.h. or over one needs protective clothing, goggles and a helmet anyway if one is not to be extremely cold and uncomfortable, and therefore there was never any problem as far as the mass of motor-cyclists, when

travelling on the open road, were concerned. At under 35 m.p.h. these things are not necessary and there is an understandable resentment among motor-cyclists at being made to wear helmets in these circumstances, particularly when one bears in mind that in built-up areas racing cycles can travel almost as fast as motor cycles and mopeds, and have a far poorer effective visibility. For that reason, there is an instinctive irritation when it appears that one section of the community is privileged at the expense of the rest.

A well known motor-cycling publication has sent a questionnaire to its readers asking them their views on the "Sikh helmet controversy", to coin a phrase. The returns are not yet complete, but the indications are that a large majority feels that Sikhs ought to conform with the law, whatever that happens to be. They would prefer there to be no compulsion but, so long as compulsion exists, they would prefer the Sikhs to fall into line with the rest of the community.

Perhaps partly because I have not ridden a motor-cycle for more years than I care to remember, I do not share that view. I am a believer in individual freedom, and it delights me that even a small section of our community is able to ride without restrictions. I also hold this view because I believe that it will open the door to greater freedom in future for other motor-cyclists. I welcome the Bill as such, but I have qualifications about the manner of its introduction and about some of its provisions. It is probably a pure coincidence, but I am afraid that there is considerable suspicion-and I can assure your Lordships that it is by no means confined to myself-that the Bill was introduced as a result of agitation in Southall. A Bill of this nature had been talked about for many years and had been resisted by Governments of both complexions for a long time. Suddenly, all doors are opened to it. As I say, it is probably pure coincidence, but many people are saying that this has come about as a result of agitation. that is an unfortunate impression to give.

The next point I want to take up is that the noble Lord, Lord Avebury, said that the wearing of the turban was a religious

principle. My information from Sikhs is that it is a religious custom, and is not one of the basic tenets of the religion equivalent to our Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount. It is not, for instance, obligatory in the sense that wearing a dagger, the Kirpan, is and, if Sikhs are allowed an exemption as regards crash-helmets, logically speaking they must be allowed to carry daggers because that is far more of an essential religious requirement. One Sikh lady to whom I spoke informed me that between 8 and 10 per cent. of Sikhs regard the wearing of the turban as an essential religious requirement. Others only do so in varying degrees.

I am anxious to be fair to the Sikh point of view in this and, in doing so, I am very pleased to quote from the Sikh Courier, an excellent publication, of winter 1974. It is good to read that responsible Sikhs themselves do not wish this legislation to be confined to themselves alone. The editorial includes the words,

Throughout our history, we have always been champions of the right of the individual to make his own decisions on matters that affect him alone; even if Sikhs never wore turbans, it would still be our duty to speak out against this bad law."

(for the compulsory wearing of crash-helmets). The editorial goes on to suggest that the cold, scientific world of the actuary has a solution to this dilemma; that is to say, all those who object to wearing a crash-helmet, whether they be Sikhs or otherwise, should pay a small additional insurance premium to indemnify the State against any likely injury caused by their not wearing helmets. I think that there is a great deal to be said for this suggestion.

I welcome the Bill, but I am rather suspicious of the timing not so much the timing of the introduction by the noble Lord, Lord Avebury, but its total acceptance by the Government, who have held out for so long. Finally, there could well be some worthwhile improvements in Committee.

3.25 a. m.

VISCOUNT BARRINGTON : My Lords, before the noble Lord speaks on behalf of the Government, I should like to detain the House for not more than two minutes, only because I should like to go on record as supporting the Bill very warmly for two reasons. First, with great respect to the noble Lord, Lord Monson, I can see no reason against the arguments put up by my noble friend Lord Avebury. Secondly, I can see a great many reasons for the Bill. If I am not out of order I should say that on looking at the gallery I count 25 reasons-but that may be out of order.

I also rise in order to take the opportunity to congratulate my noble friend Lord Grey on maiden speech which in my experience was, I think, unique in three ways. First, it was the only maiden speech I have ever heard made before 11 o'clock in the morning. Secondly, it was the only maiden speech in which the speaker was allowed two initials, being described on the play Bill, as it were, as "E.E. Grey." Thirdly, although it was not perhaps the shortest speech ever made, it was the shortest maiden speech I have ever heard, but that did not prevent it, to my mind, from being one of the best.

3.27 a.m.

LORD KINNAIRD : My Lords, I should like to say a few words. I think that today there is far too much regimentation. It may be advisable to wear seat belts, it may be advisable to wear crash-helmets, but if we want to take the risk not to wear seat belts or crash-helmets, can it not be left to the individual to take his own risks? We are badgered here, we are badgered there. We are told what to do and what not to do. I should like to support the noble Lord, Lord Avebury. If people wish to follow their own religious convictions, why can we not allow them to do so?

3.28 a.m.

LORD WELLS-PESTELL : My Lords, on behalf of the Government

I should like to add our congratulations to the noble Earl on his maiden speech. He has much to commend him, including brevity. It is the first time I have heard a maiden speech made in three minutes, and its content left nothing to be desired. We hope that we shall hear more of him in the future at fairly regular intervals.

I want to intervene only briefly for the Government. While the Bill was being considered in another place we made it clear that our attitude to it was neutral, and that is the position at the present moment. When the power to make regulations requiring motor-cyclists to wear crash-helmets was introduced in the Road Traffic Act 1972, Section 32 gave the Government power to make exceptions, but in fact no exceptions have ever been made, and I have to say, quite frankly, that it was not the intention of the Government to make any exceptions.

On the road safety grounds, the Government feel that the arguments are quite clear. Motor-cyclists wearing crash-helmets to gain a measure of very real protection in the event of an accident, and their chances of death and serious injury, in the view of the Government -and statistics show this-are reduced.

This is essentially a matter of saving life and limb. Since wearing crash-helmets was made compulsory, hundreds of people who would otherwise have suffered, many of them very severely, have been spared. The Government have looked closely at proposals that exemptions should be made in special circumstance, but they remain unconvinced by the evidence of the need for any such exemptions.

Noble Lords have listened to the persuasive arguments for Sikhs wearing turbans to be exempt, and I think most of us would say that we applaud without reservation the persistence of the Bill's sponsors in piloting it this far, and pay tribute to the way the Sikhs themselves have made their case over the past three years. All of us recognize the great contribution they have made to this country, as the Noble Lord, Lord Mowbray, pointed out. both in war and in

peace, and I would not want to say anything to detract from that. Indeed, it would not be right that I should do so. They follow their religion devoutly and sincerely-and many of us perhaps wish many other people would do likewise-and the turban is an important symbol of their faith.

As well as its religious significance, I am sure that in most cases a turban is a perfectly adequate head-dress, but the Government feel that for riding a motor-cycle it is not adequate. The turban cannot in any way provide the protection to the head that a proper crash-helmet can, which is manufactured and tested to stringent standards. The road safety arguments is clearly for the wearing of crash-helmets by all motor cyclists. The supporters of the Bill declare that in this case it is outweighed by the claims of religious tolerance, and, if I may say so, the Government understand this.

It has been suggested that it may be possible for Sikhs to wear a helmet over their long hair. I have no doubt that this is physically possible, and that on occasions, such as when playing sports, Sikhs secure their hair other than with a full turban. But the Government understand that the Sikh religion forbids the wearing of anything over or under the turban, so there seems no scope for a solution by trying to devise a turban-shaped crash-helmet. The Bill does not attempt to define a Sikh or a turban, and I am sure that this is right. Any definition would be very difficult to frame with accuracy, and would create more anomalies that it would solve. The burden would be on the accused to prove that he was entitled to the exemption, and I have no doubt that any attempt by non-Sikhs to evade the regulations by pretending to be a Sikh or wearing a bogus turban would be easily detected by the courts.

In summary, they, my Lords, the Government's position is this. the Government do not seek, as I have already said, to use their power under the Road Traffic Act to exempt Sikhs from the general requirement that motor-cyclists must wear crash-helmets. Nor are the Government convinced by any evidence that such an exemption

should be made. But we accept-and I want to emphasise this-that this case raises important questions of religious freedom and toleration. It is for Parliament to decide where the balance lies. If it concludes that religious toleration outweighs road safety, the Government will naturally, because it will be Parliament's decision, accept that decision. If, on the other hand, the Bill should fail, then, as I said earlier, the Government do not propose to make a regulation to give the Sikhs exemption. But having said that, I want to assure noble Lords that the Government are quite neutral in this matter but felt they were under an obligation, which I think they have discharged in putting before your Lordships their views, I was going to say both for and against. I hope your Lordships will feel that I have discharged that responsibility.

3.34 a.m.

LORD AVEBURY : My Lords, I wish to detain the House for only one or two moments at this extremely late hour. First, I should like warmly to congratulate my noble friend Lord Grey on his maiden speech, which has already won the admiration of all noble Lords who have spoken in this debate, and on perhaps setting a record in the lateness of the hour at which my noble friend delivered his remarks, as well as for the sympathy and understanding which he has shown for the case of the Sikhs in the remarks he addressed to the House. I certainly echo the hopes expressed by other noble Lords that we shall in future hear many times from my noble friend.

May I also thank the noble Lord, Lord Mowbray and Stourton, for the kind remarks he made in support of the Bill based on a very considerable knowledge, clearly, of the military record of the Sikhs and from close consultation with one of the most distinguished generals who commanded the Sikhs during World War II. My noble friend, too, referred to the outstanding military record of the Sikhs and the heroism that they displayed in the support of freedom during the Second World War and the importance that we should

not in civil life place stricter restrictions on them than we did at the time that we needed their services in the defence of the Free World.

I will only say this in conclusion : The noble Lord, Lord Wells-Pestell, said that there was a conflict here-and we recognise this-between the strict requirements of road safety, which would lead us to say that all motor-cyclists should wear a crash-helmet, and the countervailing principle of religious freedom which has been pressed on all sides in this debate. The noble Lord said that the Government were neutral and that it was up to Parliament to decide where the balance lies. I agree with the noble Lord, with great respect. I would draw his attention to the fact that not only have all Parties in another place given support to this Bill-and I could have mentioned, for instance, that the right honourable lady the Leader of the opposition was among those who had intended to support the honourable gentlemen, Mr. Sydney Bidwell, in his Bill-but in this House clearly the support has come from all sides. Although there was some qualified doubt expressed by the noble Lord, Lord Monson, he said that he came to the conclusion on balance that he would support the Bill.

My Lords, I very much hope that, bearing in mind what has been said in another place, and the support the Bill has received on all sides during the course of this morning's proceedings here, the Bill may now have an easy and smooth passage through your Lordships House.

On question, Bill read 2a, and committed to a Committee of the Whole House.

APPENDAGE

LETTER

From : Sydney Bidwell, M.P. to Lord Monson (an opponent)
9th October, 1976.

Lord Monson,
House of Lords,
London S.W.1.

I was privileged early the other morning to hear you make your speech in your "House" on the Motor-Cycle Crash Helmets (Religious Exemption) Bill. I am glad you struck the "Slightly discordant note" and it is not up to me to explain the true religious requirements of the Sikhs.

However, you are misinformed when you say the agitation started in Southall and I am asked to convey this to you. Sikhs listening to you were upset because, in fact, the very reverse has been the case and as far as I know, all prominent Sikhs of Southall disowned irresponsible agitation and law-breaking in some cases elsewhere.

They are highly intelligent people and realised that such behaviour, if spread, could result in an unfavourable consideration by Parliament - it would be counter-productive.

When the crash helmet regulations were introduced, the religious and British-Sikh tradition was not introduced in the Commons debate. I was away at the time on Select Committee work.

I introduced it in the form of a private Bill and found support in all parts of both Houses. That convinced all sane Sikhs that their case would be adequately examined by Parliament - and I am proud that it has been so and witnessed.

Yours sincerely,

**HOUSE OF LORDS
COMITTEE STAGE
28th October 1976**

9.13 p.m.

LORD WELLS-PESTELL : My Lords, I beg to move that the House do now resolve itself into Committee on this Bill.

Moved, that the House do now resolve itself into Committee.
(Lord Wells-Pestell)

On question, Motion agreed to.

House in Comittee accordingly.

(The Earl of Listowel in the Chair)

Clause I (Amendment of Road Traffic Act 1972).

LORD WELLS-PESTELL : This might be a convenient moment for me to say this. I thought that the noble Lord, Lord de Clifford, would be here charged with a message from the noble Lord, Lord Monson, to say that he wishes to apologise to your Lordships because he cannot be here tonight, and that he proposes to move his Amendments at a later stage in the proceedings. The noble Lord, Lord Avebury, has been informed of this, and as the noble Lord, Lord de Clifford, who was going to say this tonight is not here, I thought that somebody ought to say it.

Clauses and Schedules agreed to.

House resumed : Bill reported without Amendment : Report received.

THIRD READING HOUSE OF LORDS

LORD MONSON moved Amendment No. 1 :

Page 1. Line 6, leave out second ("subsection") and insert ("subsections").

The noble Lord said: My Lords, although the noble Lord, Lord Wells-Pestell, was kind enough to apologise on my behalf for my absence last Thursday, I should like to make my personal apologies to the House for having been unavoidably absent on that day to move these Amendments-or virtually identical ones-in Committee. As noble Lords will know, the date of the Committee stages was altered at twenty four hours' notice and I had a very long-standing engagement on the revised date in question. It was a pity in so far as we could have had a more wide-ranging and probing debate on these Amendments, and indeed on the Bill as a whole, than we are allowed under Third Reading procedures.

It will probably for the convenience of the House if I speak to all the Amendments together. I feel that a fairly full explanatory preamble will be necessary; and perhaps I could take the opportunity to clarify something I said on Second Reading, because I understand that some members of the Sikh community were, unhappily, upset by my references to "agitation". Such are the pitfalls of leaning over backwards to be tactful! One is consequently ambiguous and vague, and remarks are misinterpreted: I was not actually referring to agitation over crash-helmets. I believe that peaceful demonstrations, on this or any other topic, are entirely justified, provided that third parties are not thereby harmed or inconvenienced. In "peaceful demonstration" I would include seeking the martyrdom of courting arrest. Indeed, if I were myself a Sikh, I might well have acted in the same way, whether or not I was a practising Sikh, if I wanted to ride a motor-cycle. However, I am not a Sikh but I come from what is still, for the time being at any rate, the majority community in this country; and so I believe it is incumbent

upon me to scrutinise legislation of this kind carefully to see that the rest of us are not inadvertently put at a disadvantage by what may superficially appear to be innocuous and, indeed, welcome legislation in so far as it is of liberalising nature.

I see three possible dangers in this Bill. Granting exemption in respect of what I hold to be a religious custom rather than a religious obligation could lead to demands for exemptions on the grounds of religious obligations of less innocuous nature. I am thinking of the possible demand for the right to carry the kirpan—that is, the kirpan as such rather than the symbolic indentation in the comb. Secondly, I wonder whether passing a Bill like this towards the end of a Session might not slam the door on the possibility of extending similar liberalising legislation to other members of the community who ride motor-cycles. Thirdly, I wonder whether it might not cause resentment among the majority of motor-cyclists, who are not Sikhs, and perhaps thereby contribute to a worsening of community relations, which I am sure noble Lords would agree would be highly undesirable.

There has been a great deal of discussion in this House and in another place on whether or not the wearing of the turban, as opposed to the non-cutting of hair—which I entirely accept as being a religious obligation—is a religious obligation or merely a religious custom which has grown up over the years as a consequence of the hair not being cut. The noble Lord, Lord Mowbray and Stourton, voiced the opinion on Second Reading that this was not a fruitful line of discussion and perhaps we ought not to go into it but simply accept what the Sikhs themselves say.

The Sikhs themselves are divided in their views about this. I have heard differing views from Sikhs, to which I shall refer in a moment; and the danger of the attitude of simply accepting the assertions of people that it is indeed a religious custom is borne out by the report published in August in a South London local newspaper that certain West Indians had demanded the right to wear knitted woollen caps in court because it was their religious

custom. The judge allowed them to do so. But, anybody who knows the West Indies will know, the wearing of woollen caps has nothing to do with religion. It is simply a Black Power symbol found in the English-speaking islands in the Caribbean though not, in my experience, in the French or Spanish speaking islands. Sir Herbert Thompson, who was Resident in the Punjab, wrote in 'The times' in January 1975 that in his view the wearing of the turban was not an absolute religious requirement. He was opposed by Mr, Neville Sendelson in another place, who said that as far as he was concerned if Sikhs nowadays believed that it was a religious requirement that was all there was to be said about it.

My information on this point, which came from a Sikh lady of some eminence, is that the practice is comparable to the wearing of a nun's habit. That is to say, it is not an absolute religious requirement; it is the custom that nuns should cover their knees but it is not, of course, universal. It might be compared to the way in which many Methodists and Presbyterians abstain from alcohol. Unlike members of the Islamic faith, it is not a sin for them to indulge in alcohol but simply considered bad form. Again, it might be compared to the custom which prevailed until a few years ago among peasants in Mediterranean countries, who believed not simply that it was incumbent upon them to abstain from meat on Fridays, but that there was a positive obligation to eat fish on that day. That was not in fact the case, but they believed it to be so. I hold that it is a religious custom and not a strict religious requirement.

Other religious customs are not always given the sanction of law in this country: they are not always catered for. Many years ago, I remember that we had a passionate debate over the orthodox Jewish custom of slaughtering meat; and I am bound to say I was finally convinced by the argument of a noble Lord from these Benches who possessed great medical knowledge and explained that in his opinion virtually no cruelty was involved. For that reason I voted for a continuance of the practice. Other noble Lords felt

differently; as also do the Norwegians, who are a liberal people. On the other hand, we do not allow Moslems in this country, as far as I know, to slaughter sheep on the feast that commemorates the intended sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham. That may be partly for public health reasons, but partly because the average lay Moslem may not be able to carry out such a task without causing suffering. We do not allow Parsees to dispose of their dead in the way that-

LORD WELLS-PESTELL : My Lords, I hope the noble Lord will forgive me, but I must remind him that before the House are his Amendments and he should be moving them. He is not doing so and, if I may say so-I hope without giving offence-he is really making a Second Reading speech which he virtually made at Second Reading. I think I must remind the noble Lord that his Amendments are before the House.

LORD MONSON : I am sorry, My Lords. I had thought it necessary to give a very full preamble to explain the reason behind my Amendments. Certainly I will cut short the preamble. What I really wanted to know was whether it is the Government's intention to continue to be selective about whether to legislate on certain religious customs, depending on whether or not these conflict with the interests of the community as a whole-because if the Government continue to take this attitude the first doubt I had about this Bill can be completely disposed of. The other two doubts, that is, that the Bill would slam the door on the extending of benefit of such liberalising legislation to the rest of the community and that it might lead to bad community relations, are dealt with by my Amendments.

The Amendments to extend this legislation to those with a conscientious or religious objections (other than pertaining to the Sikh religion) is comparable to the Amendments moved by the Conservative Party in connection with the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Amendment) Act and indeed the Employment Protection Act in 1975. I should have thought that they would commend themselves to the Opposition Front Bench for that reason. Off hand, I cannot think of any other religions which object to wearing helmets, but I can see that there might well be some. As regards

extending the benefits of the Bill to other members of the community, who cannot prove a genuine religious or conscientious objection, upon payment of £10 to the Secretary of State as indemnification for any increase of burden on the National Health Service, this was inspired by an article in the 'Sikh Courier' to which I referred on Second Reading.

LORD MOWBRAY and STOURTON : My Lords, the question of the £10 insurance comes in Amendment No. 3. Can the noble Lord not take the hint of the noble Lord the Minister and move the Amendments, because all these matters will be discussed again individually.

LORD MONSON: My Lords, I had not intended to do that. I intended to discuss all the Amendments together, and if the House objected to them I would have withdrawn the first and not moved the others.

LORD AVEBURY: My Lords, I think that the noble Lord was meeting the wishes of the House when he suggested that he would discuss all five of his Amendments in the one debate.

LORD MONSON: My Lords, they all hang together and it is for that reason that I am proceeding in this way.

LORD MOWBRAY and STOURTON: My Lords, are we therefore to have just one discussion and no more, and have the Amendments moved en bloc or rejected en bloc?

LORD WELLS PESTELL: My Lords, as I understand the situation, that is so. The noble Lord, Lord Monson, will move all his Amendments in one speech, and any Member of your Lordships' House who wishes to participate will deal with them on that basis.

LORD AVEBURY : My Lords, if I may slightly correct the Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Monson, is moving the first of his Amendments, but he is speaking to all of them. Of Course, any noble Lord is free to touch on any of the matters raised in subsequent Amendments as he thinks fit.

LORD MONSON: My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Avebury, has interpreted correctly what I said at the beginning of my speech. I took paragraph (c) of Amendment No. 3 from an Amendment tabled in another place by a learned Member on the Third Reading of the

Road Traffic (Seat Belts) Bill, which was not in the event moved, and I have adapted it slightly. I have also provided that the Secretary of State could vary the amount by the Affirmative Resolution procedure, if it were found that the amount of £10 was too little or too great. It may be the feeling of the House that the amendment should be dealt with separately, but Amendment No. 3 is the one on which there is more than one issue presented. The others are all consequential or to do with the Title, but we cannot divide Amendment No. 3 into its constituent parts.

I have said that I felt that granting exemption to one small section of the community could lead to bad community relations, and that suggestion was rather dismissed in another place on Second Reading by Mr. Sidney Bidwell. But I have some information which is not generally available. The 'Motorcycle Rider' took a poll among members of the British Motorcycle Federation—quite a large sample of just under 900 people and of those who gave a positive reply 69 per cent. were opposed to granting Sikhs an exemption which was not available to the public at large. This is a significant figure, and I believe that my Amendments would dissipate any feeling or antagonism or hostility towards the Bill as a whole. My Lords, I beg to move.

VISCOUNT MASSEREENE and FERRARD: My Lords, may I just say a few words? I cannot understand how anyone could possibly object to persons of the Sikh religion not wearing crash helmets, and I cannot support these Amendments. I understand that we are dealing with the Amendments en bloc, and as regards the sum of £10 to cover anyone who does not come into the categories covered in paragraph (b). I would say that if you fall off a motorcycle and crack your skull because you are not wearing a crash helmet, it will probably cost £400 to £500 to reimburse the Health Service. With due respect to my noble friend—he is not of the same Party, but he is my friend I do not think he is on the right lines here. If persons are to be exempted through the payment of money, which is a bad principle in itself, it should be more like £400 or £500. Having said that, I will sit down, but I cannot support these Amendments. I do not want to be rude, but I would say that they are rather nonsense.

7.37 p.m.

LORD MOWBRAY and STOURTON : My Lords, I should like to say a few words. I appreciate what the noble Lord, Lord Monson, is trying to do. He has the idea that this is a Bill favouring a minority and I accept that, in principle, one does not like legislating for minorities to be exempted from what the rest of the country is doing. But, as I said on Second Reading, we have already in two World Wars allowed the Sikhs to fight for us in units organised, commanded, led and paid for by the Crown, and they have died for the Crown wearing their turbans instead of the regulation steel helmet. The principle has been accepted throughout this country. The present Government of India-this is slightly irrelevant-still allows Sikhs to keep their turbans in the Air force and the Army of India.

With great respect to the noble Lord, Lord Monson, I found some of his remarks about nuns habits slightly irrelevant. Then he talked about peasants in Mediterranean countries feeling that they had to eat fish. So far as I know, everyone in the Roman Catholic Mediterranean countries-peasants, nobles, industrialists, merchants, the lot-merely has to abstain from eating meat on certain days; and since Vatican II, as the noble Lord knows, that does not apply. But, as he also knows, it was never a mortal sin and when there is starvation this rule will obviously not apply.

These religious arguments are slightly immaterial; they are not comparing like with like. Equally, I do not regard Moslems slaughtering sheep in their houses as comparing like with like. Far more important, we should consider the police who have to enforce all these Acts. Here we have a simple Bill which the Government have put before us-not, with great respect, the Government of the noble Lord, Lord Avebury-and every time we legislate we make the life of the police more complicated. If we were to accept the noble Lord's widening of the defense to include all other people who have a genuine religious or conscientious objection, plus the people who are willing to pay an annual insurance of £10, the task of the police

would be that much harder. Are the police to ask to see a motorcyclist's insurance certificate or something like that? It is too much to ask, and it is not necessary. The noble Lord mentioned things like seat belts but let us not be drawn into that discussion, either. The question of seat belts is not before us at the moment and we should waste a lot of time if we discussed it. Let us keep the discussion simple because it is a simple Bill.

The Sikh community feel and have always felt passionately about this matter and their reasons were understood by Governments during two world wars and before those wars. With the greatest respect to the noble Lord, Lord Monson, I cannot accept, from what I have learned by speaking to people, that anything like 69 per cent. of the population objects to the Bill. I find that it is a most unacceptable percentage. If you said to anybody, "I suppose you know that Sikhs usually wear turbans and that they wear them in the Army and in the Air Force. If they are willing to take this risk on motor-bikes, a turban is a good protection", I do not believe that he would argue with you. I have met only one or two people who think that it is slightly unfair that although Sikhs can wear their turbans they cannot wear their ordinary headgear. It goes no further than that.

I do not believe that the Bill can possibly arouse the racial tension that the noble Lord is worried about. If I believed that I should be much more with the noble Lord but I do not believe that is true. Much though I admire the noble Lord, Lord Monson, and his intentions, so far as I and these benches are concerned I recommend the House not to accept these Amendments.

7.42 p.m.

LORD AVEBURY : My Lords, I am extremely grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Mowbray and Stourton, who has said just about everything that there is to be said on the group of Amendments that is before us and who has said it much more eloquently than I can. I must begin by apologising to the noble Lord, Lord Monson, for the very short notice which was given, stating that it was necessary to change the day of the Committee stage last week, thereby causing

him some inconvenience, as I am aware from the correspondence which we have exchanged. At the same time may I offer my congratulations to the noble Lord on the happy family event which prevented him from being with us during the Committee stage last week, something which I perfectly understand.

We have to ensure, as the noble Lord has said, that the rest of us are not put at a disadvantage by legislation which we introduce in favour of a particular religion. May I point out to your Lordships, if it needs pointing out, that there is nothing in the Bill which in any way affects the status of motor-cyclists other than those who are of the Sikh religion. They are still subject to the restrictions imposed by the Road Traffic Act. There is no alteration whatsoever to those restrictions.

I want to say also that I agree wholeheartedly with the noble Lord, Lord Mowbray and Stourton, that the figure of 69 per cent. of responses to the poll which was mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Monson, probably requires considerable examination, more examination than we have time to give to it this evening. However, if you invite people to say what is their opinion of a particular change it is human nature that nearly always you get the people who are strongly opposed to something writing in and expressing an opinion. If those were the figures which arose from the request by this magazine for the opinions of its readers, I am not at all surprised but I think that I should tell your Lordships that after the Second Reading of the Bill, when the debates in our House were presumably reported in the motor-cycling Press, I had a total of two letters. One was couched in neutral terms but commented on what the person had read in the motor-cycling journal. The other letter was from a person who is mildly against the exemption of Sikhs. I would not put it any more strongly than that. From the discussions that I have had with non-Sikh motor-cyclists I do not believe that there is any resentment whatsoever against the concession that we are proposing to make. I agree entirely with the noble Lord, Lord Mowbray and Stourton, that it would be a disaster if, by passing legislation such as this, we were in any way to undermine the good relationships which have always existed between the Sikhs and the

rest of the populations.

If the noble Lord, Lord Monson, will forgive me, I do not propose to follow him in detail regarding the general points he has made on exemptions because we are not dealing with the wider issues that he was seeking to raise: whether the Government might feel, if we are to pass this legislation, that it would in any way inhibit their thinking on future changes to the Road Traffic Act. It is not for me to interpret the mind of the Government. However, one is bound to say to the noble Lord that of course the Government are always going to say that they are open to representations on a matter of this kind and that they do not close their mind from one Session to another but that it is extremely unlikely that, having gone down this road, any arguments which might be produced would convince them to make the kind of modifications that the noble Lord is suggesting in these amendments.

I say that for two reasons. First, prior to the introduction of the compulsory wearing of crash-helmets I believe that the percentage of voluntary crash-helmet wearing had increased to something like three-quarters of the total number of motor cyclists on the road, that the increase was beginning to slacken off at that stage and that we had probably reached the limit of what could be accomplished by voluntary persuasion. Therefore if we start to water down the regulations we might very quickly find ourselves back in the situation that we were in prior to the introduction of compulsion and there would be no point in having the legislation on the Statute Book.

Secondly, if we grant the concession that people who pay a penalty of £10 should not be required to wear crash helmets, there are in the first place the powerful objections voiced by the noble Lord, Lord Mowbray and Stourton. Also it would extend the concessions so widely as virtually to nullify the whole of the Road Traffic Act. My honourable friend Mr. Bidwell whom I have consulted is not prepared to accept such an enormous widening of the Bill, since it was never his intention when he first introduced the Bill to do more than take care of the very carefully defined and limited claims which had been made by the Sikhs. There is no other religious group which has any objection to wearing crash helmets

May I suggest to your Lordships that the first part of the Amendment virtually invites the creation of such groups. Also, it invites an individual to declare that he has a genuine conscientious objection to wearing a crash helmet without saying how that objection is to be tested. I believe that it would wreck the principle of compulsory crash helmet wearing if we were to accept this series of Amendments. Therefore I must ask your Lordships to reject them.

7.48 p.m.

LORD WELLS-PESTELL : My Lords, at this stage perhaps I should say something on behalf of the Government, although I do not want to repeat in detail what I said at Second Reading. The noble Lord, Lord Mowbray and Stourton, has put the Government position very well. As your Lordships will recognise, this Amendment would extend the exemption from Sikhs to many more people who object to wearing crash-helmets. The Government remain convinced of the value of compulsory crash-helmet wearing and could not remain neutral to a Bill which went beyond the Sikhs.

The Government take a neutral view at this stage. They recognise that an adequate case has been made out so far as the Sikhs themselves are concerned, but they have no intention to extend that exemption to any other group. If Amendment No. 3, moved by the noble Lord, Lord Monson, were passed, the cause of an exemption for Sikhs would be gravely jeopardised as a result. It is because the Government attach considerable importance to the wearing of crash-helmets, recognise that in their view the Sikhs have made out an exceptionally strong case for exemption and have no intention to extend that exemption to any other group that I ask your Lordships to reject the Amendments which are before you.

LORD MONSON : My Lords, if I may, I shall deal first with a point made by my noble friend Lord Massereene and Ferrard. He spoke about the cost of a cracked skull being £400 to £500. Of course the £10 which I suggested was purely as an insurance premium. I am sure he does not believe that every time anybody gets on a motor-

cycle they are going to fall off on to their heads. It might be useful at this point to mention the American experience. We have had a compulsory crash helmet law in this country for about 3½ years; the Americans have had it for 10 years. They have found that, although the incidence of fractured skulls is greatly reduced, the incidence of broken necks has increased because the weight of the helmet adds to the weight of the skull and causes a whiplash effect, upon sudden breaking. It may be useful to point out that both the American Senate and the House of representatives have voted overwhelmingly to rein back, as it were, upon compulsory crash helmet legislation.

The noble Lord, Lord Mowbray and Stourton, rather implied that I was opposing the Bill. In fact I am not opposing it and I hope I made that clear. I am trying to extend its benefits to more people; and I have certain doubts about it. The point about the nun's habit was made to me by a very respected Sikh lady. It is not the case, as he believes, that every Sikh is for the Bill as it stands. Some do not care very much either way, while others would like the Bill widened to include other members of the community, because they do not want to feel that they are specially privileged. It may be that they are in a minority; but they are a significant minority. The noble Lord spoke about the difficulties that would be imposed on the police. There is not time to go into how I suggest that might be overcome.

I suggest that there are equal difficulties in trying to establish who is and who is not a Sikh. Supposing somebody a Hindu or Moslem or Indian Christian or indeed someone from the Near East or a Mediterranean country wants to put on a turban, how are they going to know, if they are doing that simply to challenge the law? Mr. Sidney Bidwell in another place believed that the Bill would apply only to those who practised the full faith, that others who had turned away from the full faith would not qualify for exemption under the Bill. The Bill does not say this. Nobody has to prove or produce a certificate to say that they are practicing Sikhs, so I suggest that the task for the police, even with the Bill as it stands, will not be as easy as the noble Lord suggests.

The noble Lord also cast doubt on my figure of 69 per cent. of motor-cyclists opposing the granting of exemption to Sikhs alone, as did the noble Lord, Lord Avebury. The poll was not confined to this one question only. There were many questions about the wearing of helmets, and about motor-cycling generally. Not only people who felt strongly about Sikhs replied. We shall know tomorrow morning whether the opinion polls in the United States are wrong, but more often than not they are reasonably accurate. I fear that if these Amendments are rejected, as it appears they will be, there will be resentment. Perhaps it will not be great but there will be some. I think it is a great pity, particularly as so many Sikhs would have liked the Bill extended to other sections of the community. Obviously I am in a fairly small minority tonight and therefore I beg leave to withdraw the Amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Bill passed.

The Bill was reported to the House of Commons and was agreed without division. A protest was made by a Conservative M.P. who alleged there had been insufficient debate in the Commons but Mr. Speaker ignored his protest. This member arrived late on the day of the successful Commons Third Reading.

Royal Assent was given on 15th November 1976.

The battle of the turban in Britain stands forever in the history books and must receive world acclaim. I am proud to have played some part.



Prime Minitster Winston Churchill meets with Sikh soldiers during WW II Photo Courtesy IWM. London



World War One and World War Two saw 83,000 Sikh soldiers killed and over 100,000 wounded fighting for the British.



Britishers Saluting Sikh Soldiers In World War



Sikhs March into Paris, France during World War 2

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